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SERVING OUR GENERATION.

A DISCOURSE

COMMEMORATIVE OF

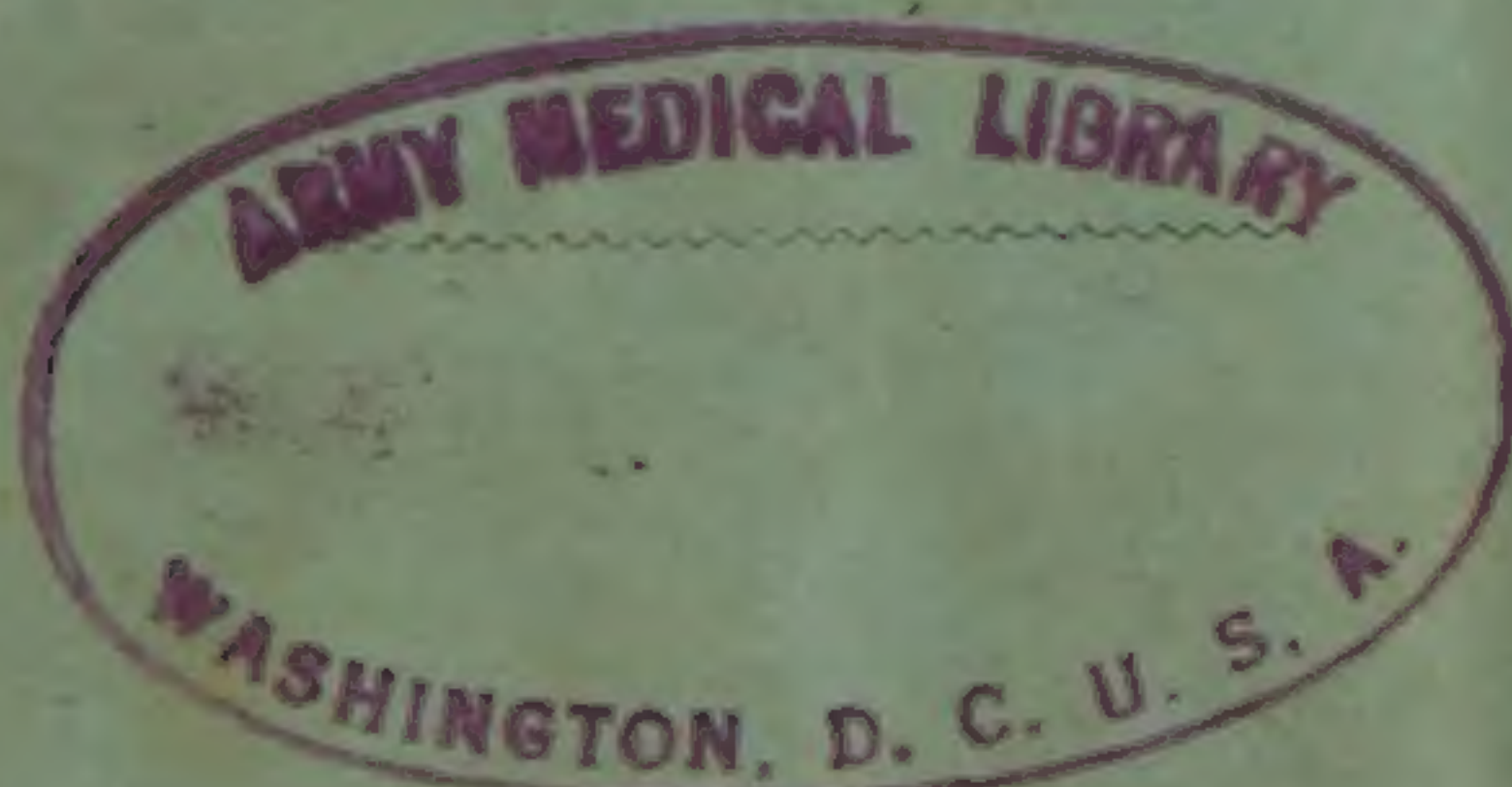
THE LIFE WORK

OF

JOHN D. FORD, M. D.

DELIVERED IN THE FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, WINONA,
MINNESOTA, SABBATH, NOVEMBER 3D, 1867.

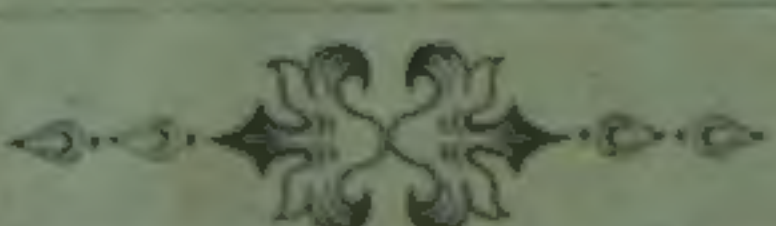
BY REV. GEORGE M. STONE.



WINONA:

GREEN & GILE, PRINTERS, DEMOCRAT OFFICE.

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[CORRESPONDENCE.]

WINONA, Nov. 9, 1867.

To REV. GEO. M. STONE:

DEAR SIR: The undersigned having listened with deep interest to the sermon preached by you on Sunday morning the 3d instant, commemorative of our late esteemed fellow citizen, Dr. JOHN D. FORD, and feeling assured that its publication would be gratifying to the numerous friends of the lamented deceased, would respectfully request a copy thereof for that purpose.

Very truly yours,

WM. F. PHELPS,
THOS. WILSON,
WM. S. DREW,

J. W. SPRAGUE,
J. H. STEWART,
H. P. SPERRY.

WINONA, Nov. 11, 1867.

MESSRS. J. W. SPRAGUE, WM. F. PHELPS, AND OTHERS: Your note of the 9th instant, requesting a copy of the memorial discourse having reference to the life and services of Dr. FORD is received. I submit to your judgment in the matter, and will soon place the manuscript in your hands.

Hoping that its publication may in some degree serve the great interests of education and religion,

I am most sincerely yours.

GEO. M. STONE.

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MEMORIAL DISCOURSE.

ACTS: 13 36.—For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers.

The motto in German upon the coat-of-arms of the Prince of Wales is "*I serve.*" Service, in our providential allotment, is, in the light of our Master's words, the best distinction of king or subject. His declaration to his disciples, "Whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant," was a seed truth, which waits only upon time to revolutionize the maxims and the conditions of human society. In the text, an inspired epitome of David's life, we have added to the simple idea of service, the fact of its application to a given generation. "David, after he had served his own generation, by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers." His work was wisely adjusted to his time.—He studied his generation and served it with fidelity, until having toiled out the day of life, he fell asleep upon his royal throne, and was gathered to his fathers. Then, he rendered this service "by the will of God." He who would adjust himself completely to the work of his time must go up into God's counsel through a believing union with him.

We take these three thoughts as suggesting lessons befitting this hour, in which summoned by common affection, and common grief, we meet to dwell on the re-

moval of a citizen and a brother, whose high meed of praise is that "*he served his generation by the will of God.*"

I. *Service is our human lot, and when well rendered is our glory and our crown.* We are each and all servants. There is behind and above every life a power overseeing and commanding it. No life-plan is absolutely self-projected. Every man is moved and controlled by certain dominant principles, and these principles head either in Christ or in Belial. The springs of motivity are hidden in both cases. An unseen hand holds the reins of our spirits, and time in its developments, is showing whether that hand is the one which was nailed to the cross or the one which was raised in impious revolt in heaven. Our work neither terminates upon ourselves, nor originates with ourselves. Man is at highest only a second cause. We come into being in the presence of mighty antagonistic causes, on the one hand, and their diverse effects on the other. No soul can hold an equipoise between these. "Choose ye whom ye will serve," is the utterance of our consciousness as well as the word of God. It is this fact lying at the threshold of our lives, which invests their early stages with such transcendent interest. When the traveler upon the Arabian deserts rises in the morning, his first work is to observe the rising sun, and fix his course for the day. The Orientals have given a name to this process. They say a man "*orients himself.*"—Every point of the compass is determined when the sun is discovered in its place, and the traveler chooses his direction intelligently and safely. Suppose a company of travelers should neglect this observation, and choose their path from the tracks left in the sand by the caravans which had preceded them. The next simoon of the desert is likely to cover them for miles, and they are left upon the treeless ocean to reap a settled despair as the fruit of their folly. Like pilgrims on the desert's edge are we, when we come into the conscious inheritance of this life. We are both instruments and agents. Agents because we choose whom we will serve, and instruments

because, having made choice, we enter upon a course of life-long service. We must choose our master powers.— If we take God as our sun, and his law as our compass, we shall succeed. Fall when and where we may, if we die inserted in God's great plan, there can be no failure. But if we look below, choose our way from the variable standards of men, our end will be to be overwhelmed with confusion and defeat darker than the grave. It is a point worthy of being noted here, that the whole drift and direction of life is sometimes determined by what appears at the time to be a trivial circumstance. The choice of a situation or an employer, our decision upon the business we are to follow for life, may set us in the road toward eternal honor, or push us aside into the by-path of sin. Who does not remember the time when he came to the place where two ways met? An unwillingness to wait for the slow returns of industry has brought many a young man to serve the fearful taskmaster of Mammon. Inordinate haste in the acquisition of riches has stranded many a soul whose early training all drew it toward Christ. Then again, an aversion to suffering has been the weak element in numerous characters. Men choose to put themselves under the mastery of evil powers, because for the present they promise ease and immunity from suffering. It has been said that a human spirit is never so nearly angelic as just before it decides to forsake the path of virtue. The powers of heaven invite and woo it. It beholds in their peerless beauty the rewards of the steadfast and just. But the dark Principality masses its forces, and "with horrid zeal and execrable art" pushes the onset. Now a kind look, an encouraging word, is sometime the feather in the scale which causes it to dip toward God. Oh! men of truth, be true! And oh! man of the world, *beware!* An exhibition of the immediate advantages of swerving from truth may incline a soul forever downwards. To you is given the fearful opportunity of imperiling a soul freighted with immortal being. Having made choice of God,

service is our true glory and joy. When the veil of sin is rent, and we are let into something like a just conception of God, and of our relation to Him, our instinctive position is, "Command me—use me." To be an instrument wielded by such a power, and to contribute to ends so glorious as those which he contemplates, fills our highest conception of living. It is this confidence, that God is *using* them, which has in all periods of the Church's history, raised men quite out of themselves in their earthly work. With Luther, the feeling that he was borne onward, in and by the mighty current of divine purposes, gave him heart and nerve in circumstances which would have overmastered human strength. His whole being was penetrated with the idea that the cause was not his, *personally*, but God's. The heaviest burdens we ever carry might be lifted from us, if we would but habitually recognize our place as servants. No one of us is called, Atlas-like, to carry the world upon our shoulders. Our calling is to perform a given and limited work. This done in fidelity, we may leave the rest with him who carries the cares of this world easier than we can those of the smallest sphere. How, as with a kind of pride, does the apostle refer to himself in this relation! He designates himself constantly as "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ," varying the statement, in the words, "whose I am, and whom I serve."

Nay, more than this, in those glimpses which are given us of angelic life in the word of God, we find them doing the errands of the Almighty. One of them stands with a drawn sword to turn a disobedient prophet from his course. Another—perhaps the same one, strikes off the chains of Peter in the prison, and they are spoken of collectively in the terms, "Are they not *all* ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?" But if the good are servants, so are the evil. The significant declaration of the Master is confirmed in the history of every unbeliever. "Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin." The sinner

is also used. He is the tool of the rulers of the darkness of this world. The evil principality is organized, and in crafty foresight assigns his field and work, to every instrument who submits himself to its mastery. I know of no impression more awakening than the possibility that any of us are being manipulated with our immortal faculties in the interest of the kingdom of evil.— Oh! it is a question which should check our ardor in any pursuit, and cause us to pause at any age. What powers am I serving? and where will the aggregate of my life's work leave its traces? I am growing old, and why?— My life is being paid out in toil which chisels furrows on my face, and wrinkles on my brow, for what? Let each one answer before God.

II. The second thought we are to consider is *that the highest service is that which is wisely adapted to our time.*— David served *his own generation*. He who serves his generation must be a discriminating student of it. It has been said, “the noblest study of mankind is man.”— What shall we say of the complicated subject presented to us in a generation of men? How sublime a study is the action and interaction of causes in this case! What careful induction from facts, and what wise weighing of the bearing of events is necessary to qualify one to serve any generation well, and especially such an one as our own! For generations have their distinctive characteristics as truly as do individuals. Different and peculiar services are required by different generations.

Moral principles and laws abide unchangeable in their nature, but their application to any particular time, is a work ever new and varying. It has been well said, that “the clearest and highest generalization we can reach is eternal change founded on eternal unity; laws which cannot change, regulating with infinite exactitude, duties which are susceptible of boundless modification.” Suppose the Hebrew psalmist called to stand amid the scenes of the present day. He would find the forms of life indeed changed. He would find us inheriting the result of

eighteen centuries of Christian civilization. But he would recognize moral distinctions immediately. He would see a right now to be maintained, and a wrong to be opposed. Who can doubt that he would bring at once from the armory of God its old and well tried weapons, and prove their quality again in the conflicts of to-day? He would see in the conflicts of our time, but a continuation under different circumstances and names of the same which existed in his life time. While nations declare war and conclude treaties of peace, God has declared perpetual hostility between good and evil, until the latter is overthrown in the earth. Thus each generation is to apply eternal and unchangeable standards of truth to the then present life and experience. This is our allotment of labor to-day. We are to take the truths which God has inscribed upon the symbols of commerce and civilization in other times, and transfer them to our forms of life. "Holiness to the Lord" is to be taken from "the bells of the horses," and inscribed upon the steam ship and the rail car.

The restless activities of our time are to be turned into such channels as will add to the true weal of the race.—No close observer of our generation has failed to mark the *inquiring spirit* which characterizes it. Ours is not one of the slumbering ages. It is rather one of turning and overturning. The *ipse dixit* of antiquity does not suffice for us. Established precedents, however venerable from age or fame, are subjected to the severe analysis of men, who are dissatisfied until they reach the very seeds and foundations of things. Ought we not then, it may be asked, to feel unusual solicitude under such conditions for the kingdom of our Lord? The man of enlightened religious faith answers, *Nay*. This is the day we have prayed and waited for. We will not now fail to recognize the answer to our petitions. The church of God reaches her best state when she stirs the bosom of society most deeply to inquire. It should be our aim so constantly to keep our Divine Master before men, that

they shall be moved to say one to another, "What think ye of Christ?" Our work should *force* men to raise questions. If it lead them to examine the foundations upon which our faith rests, we welcome the fact. That Bible which is itself the quickener of our civilization, can bear to have all the light it produces thrown back upon itself. It is a time in which to assert the right of private judgment. To his Judge on high every man stands or falls.

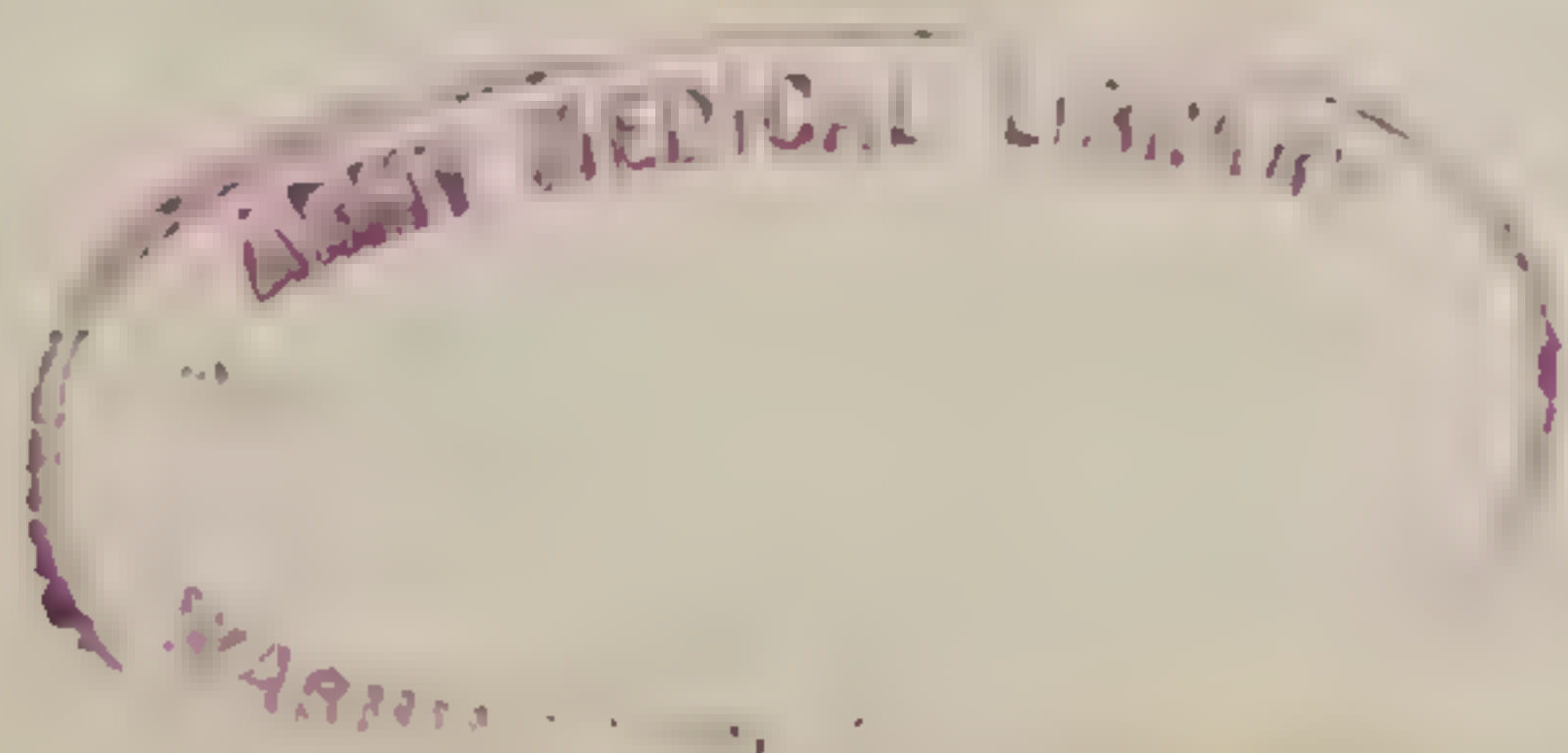
"Mitres and crowns are man-created things,
We own no master but the King of Kings."

Patience however, is needed in such an age.

We must have faith enough to wait for things to grow. Over what seems to be chaotic the Spirit of God is brooding, and order divinely beautiful will in due time appear. Prophet-like we must see the purposes which God has whispered to us from His word, blossoming into reality. Because God perseveres, we believe that

"Humanity sweeps onward. Where to-day the martyr stands,
To-morrow crouches Judas, with the silver in his hands,
While the hooting mob of yesterday, in silent awe return,
To glean up scattered ashes for history's golden urn."

It is our lot to live in a *period of transition*, and such periods make greater demands upon our faith, our patience, and our zeal than more quiet ages. Two things are necessary in order that we may be equipped for service at such a time. First, we must recognize the spirit of the age, that spirit which God is breathing through it, and then we must discriminate those counter-currents which antagonistic powers are employing to check this spirit. Is it not evident that the idea which God is impressing upon our age is His presence and activity in it? His providence is daily echoing His word, that all values, all world forces, are gathering about the kingdom of His Son. On the other hand the marvels of scientific discovery are being employed by the opponents of the gospel, in the interest of materialism and irreligion.—When so much is known of what we call the forces of nature, men are apt to be diverted from a recognition of a personal living God. The first cause is overshadowed by second causes. Men of religious faith are called to



stand, a connecting link between the science of the age, and the God whom it is to glorify.

III. We can be equipped for service only by daily study and application of the revealed will of God.—When David ascended the throne after the corrupting reign of Saul, he said, “Let us bring the ark of our God again to us, for we inquired not at it in the days of Saul.” Let us now turn to it, as the light to guide us, and we shall walk safely. How the heart of the Christian patriot quails when he contemplates the work of the present generation. I know it is said that men in their conceit are apt to over estimate the importance of their time, but certainly a survey of the gigantic details before us cannot fail to impress us with the value of these hours of opportunity, as well as inspire strong faith in an Almighty arm. Our work is no less, by looking to God for help, than the permanent establishment of free institutions on this continent, the education of millions to bear the burden of a free government, through the diffusion of a pure Christianity, the complete enfranchisement of all our oppressed, and finally the propagation of the gospel throughout the whole world. With this mission before us we may well say, “cease from man, whose breath is in his nostrils.” By faith we look to God—

“Our help in ages past,
Our hope in years to come.”

Upon his arm we roll the mighty burden. These thoughts have been perhaps appropriate as an introduction to a brief analysis of the character of one who accepted and kept a servant’s place, and who lived with something like a just sense of its responsibilities.

JOHN DEMING FORD was born in Cornish, New Hampshire, April 18th, 1816. His native town has given to the world not a few men known to fame, among whom is Chief Justice Salmon P. Chase. The single incident which we have of his youth is his early profes-

sion of Christ. He united with the Baptist church at twelve years of age. In tracing some features of his character which seem to have qualified him for eminent service in his generation, I remark :

I. That Dr. Ford was in the best sense an *educated man*. He graduated from Dartmouth College in 1839, with a class numbering sixty-one. Among his classmates who have achieved honorable distinction, may be mentioned, the Hon. Geo. G. Fogg, U. S. Senator from New Hampshire. The fact that he completed the curriculum of a literary institution, did not indeed constitute him a truly educated man, though we have reason to conclude that he laid then broad and deep the foundations of systematic *self-culture*. His mental powers, originally more than ordinary, were developed by careful and conscientious culture, throughout his entire life.—When called, as he was, to form an integral element in the history of this young and growing State, he brought to it a mind so trained and disciplined, and so well furnished with resources, as to leave upon its polity and institutions a most lasting and valuable impress. Who can estimate the worth of such a man, at such a time as that in which he became a resident of this State?

II. In the choice of a profession for life, he entered upon a career of real service. The conscientious and successful physician is never too highly estimated as a member of society. Indeed too often he is the hardest worked, and perhaps the least appreciated of men. His calling leaves him little opportunity for the habitual enjoyment of home, or to consult his own ease. In Summer's heat and Winter's cold, he keeps his busy round, and plies his healing ministry. Dr. Ford was a martyr to his professional duties. He graduated from the Medical College of the city of Philadelphia, in 1844, and entered immediately upon the practice of medicine at Norwich, Connecticut. The indefatigable zeal with which he pursued his work, soon introduced him to a most extensive practice. The community felt that he was not simply a

physician, but a man of culture and faith, whose presence in their families was always the means of blessing. The twelve years of his professional life at Norwich, are long since passed. Their history will not probably be written here, but they have gone up to engrave their record upon the book of God's remembrance. What instances there were in it of life rescued through his hand from the jaws of death, what services rendered to the poor under the power of disease, when his only reward was the tribute of their tearful gratitude! He was a Christian physician, and carried, we doubt not, his Christian experience into his professional life. No calling can be discharged without faith in God, but there is a special fitness where other qualifications exist, in the making choice by the disciple of Christ of the *healing art* as his life work. Though Dr. Ford had retired from the profession, we think we hazard nothing in saying in behalf of his brethren who remain in it, that he will be missed from its ranks.

III. We remark further that while actively engaged in his chosen work in Norwich, he frequently stopped aside from it to serve other interests, especially those of the cause of education. He labored persistently to perfect the Common School system of that intelligent and picturesque city of Connecticut. His constitution, naturally somewhat frail, sunk, however, under accumulating burdens, and necessitated a change of climate. An old resident of the city has described him stepping from the boat upon the levee in this city, in company with Rev. Dr. Hiscox, then his pastor, on a May morning in 1855. Not long after he took up his residence here, and became closely identified with the interests of his adopted home. His professional career here, though eminently successful, terminated after a few years of unremitting labor, and now is in some measure overshadowed by his distinguished services in behalf of the educational interests of the city and State. He placed a high and just estimate upon the Common School system of the Eastern

States, and labored assiduously to engraft it upon the policy of this State. He lived to see his wishes in this respect realized in a great degree. The young State in which he lived in her generous School fund and liberal educational policy leads her older sisters of New England. I shall not forget last midsummer standing with Dr. Ford upon the lower roof of his residence, the day of the completion of your chaste and beautiful City High School edifice. Strains of music from its tower were borne over to us while he, with a flush of pride described the features of the building. His work with reference to the Normal School system of this State has received a merited tribute from the pen of one who from intimate association with him was qualified, as is no one else, to speak. *

He says: "The crowning labors in the life of this good man are those which he has so unselfishly and nobly given toward the establishment of the great Normal School system of the State. Dr. Ford was, we believe, the first to propose this comprehensive plan for the preparation of teachers, without which all other efforts for the education of the masses must be comparatively valueless. Few men in our country yet appreciate as fully as he has done the great idea symbolized and represented by these institutions for the training of those who are to become the missionaries and instructors of the masses. He believed with Horace Mann, that, "coiled up within this institution, is a spring whose uncoiling may wheel the spheres." Hence his faith in its power for good amounted almost to inspiration. We think none will differ with us in the expression of the belief that but for his labors the Normal School of this State would not now be in existence. Through all its vicissitudes he has been the same unwavering, hopeful, counselor and friend. While others have despaired, he has believed. When others were indifferent and inactive, he labored, and not until he beheld it a fixed fact—not until he foresaw it clearly

* Prof. Wm. F. Phelps.

expanding in the fullness of its power and usefulness—not, we fear, until he felt premonitions of failing mortality and a growing necessity for repose from the cares of life, did he relinquish his place at the helm, where he has nobly stood through the last eight dubious years.”

He could afford to wait the verdict of posterity upon such an enterprise as this. And when the tramp of the coming generations shall have been heard for centuries over the fertile plains of Minnesota, when the noble institution rising yonder into form and beauty, shall have lifted during those centuries its crowned turrets toward the sky, his name will be mentioned, as that faithful, early worker, who would not bate one jot of heart or hope until he saw the Normal idea wrought into the pillars of this State.

IV. Dr. Ford endeavored to make his peculiarities serve the best interests of society. He was a marked, peculiar man. He had the capacity to project, and a will strong enough to execute, large plans. He may have seemed cold and unsympathising when some favorite plan, crystalizing in his mind, absorbed his energies.—But behind it all the life current still ran warm. Says one who knew him most intimately, “He was emphatically a man of *deeds*, and not of words. *Principle*, not feeling, governed all his life. The question with him was not one of inclination or pleasure alone; but is it *right*? is it duty? That being settled, he never hesitated, but with remarkable tenacity of purpose, he persevered unto the end. When Dr. Ford undertook anything, we felt that if it came within the range of human possibilities, it was sure to be accomplished. Obstacles and opposition could not turn him from his purpose.”

If he was impatient of restraint and opposition, it was because his decisions were reached generally after due consideration. He intimated upon his death bed, his reluctance to depart and leave some plans unexecuted.—We cannot lift the veil to inquire what they were.—

Though in appearance old, he was but fifty-one. His day of life was cut short not far beyond its noon.

"What mortal's work is done?
What servant shall be as his Lord?
'Tis finished—was a dying cry once heard—
It rose to heaven—alone."

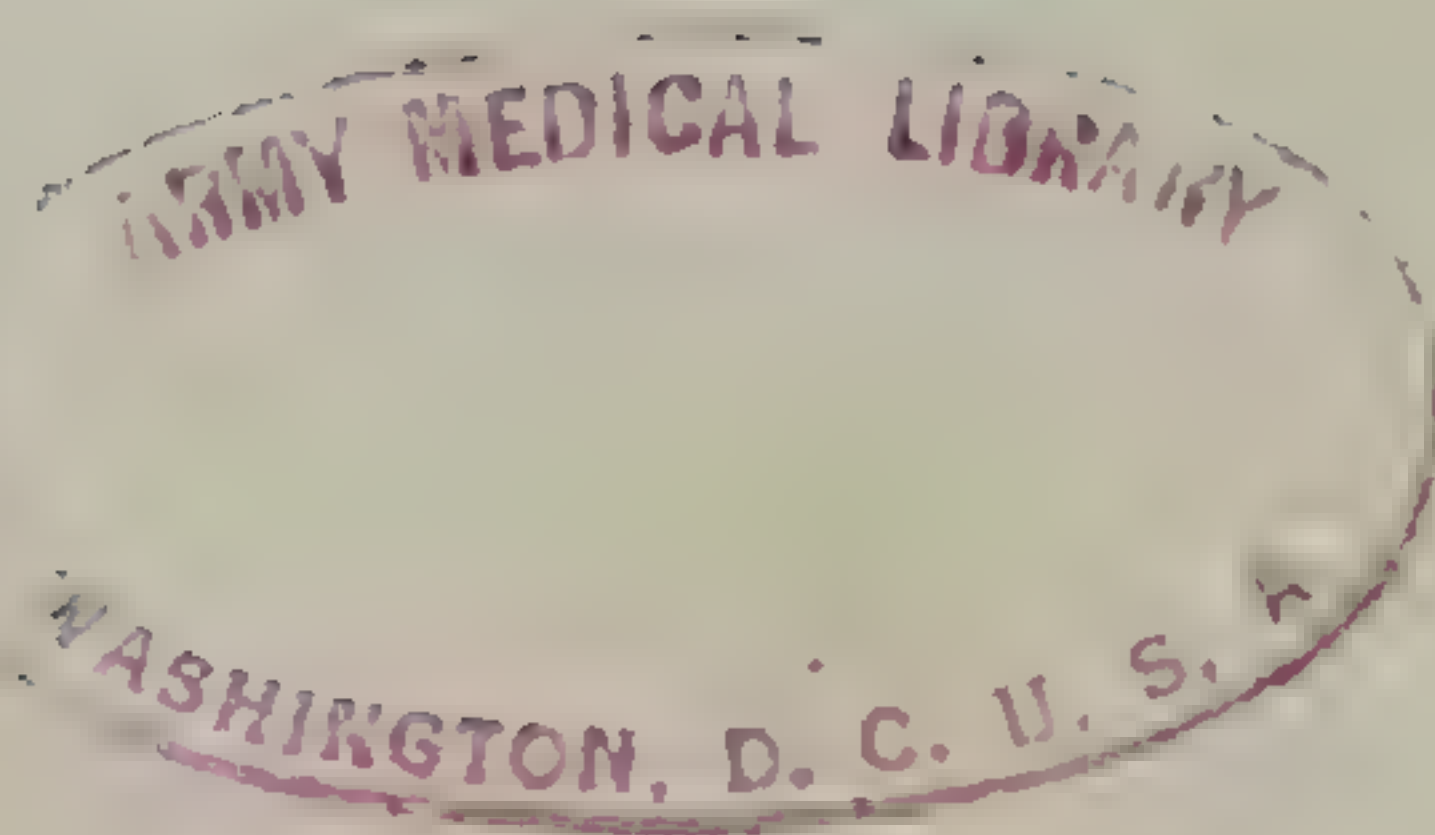
V. In the amenities of life, and in the higher walks of culture, he served well. Dr. Ford was a gentleman who brought the courtly manners of the old school into the present generation. His courtesy to strangers has contributed in no small degree to the enviable reputation for hospitality which Winona enjoys. He had a strong aversion to public life, and always appeared to the best advantage when extending the cordialties of his delightful home to strangers or friends. His cultivated taste, and love of the beautiful in art and nature, made that home and its surroundings an object on which the eye loved to linger. Its pleasant walks and bowers, its varied flowers and fruits, will miss his familiar presence, while faith beholds him,

"in those celestial gardens,
Where angels walk, and seraphs are the wardens."

He was an ardent lover of music. When care-fretted and weary, it brought him soothing and rest. He greatly enjoyed the service of song in the house of the Lord, and kept his place in the choir up to the period of his last sickness.

VI. But *lastly* and *chiefly*—he served his generation as a *Christian*. He put on the Lord Jesus Christ at Cornish, at twelve years of age. His membership was afterwards transferred to the Norwich Central Baptist Church, from which body he was received into the First Baptist Church of Winona by letter, according to its official record, Jan. 30, 1857. He took this church into his heart as his personal care, and toiled and planned for it, as he would for an individual interest. His piety was not of the demonstrative type. Indeed it had not as much self-revelation as we could have wished. His fellow-disciples would have welcomed disclosures of Christian experience which he took with him unrevealed into the other

world. While on the borders of the river of death, he expressed his regret at having done so little for the cause he loved so much. What to others seemed so great appeared to him to dwindle into insignificance in the light which was reflected from a near eternity. Like others, we believe, he cast everything else away, to trust the simple word of his Savior. With this vision of him, leaning on Jesus in the swellings of Jordan, we dismiss his earthly life. Faults it doubtless had, but they seem to-day lost in the sum of his virtues. Errors of judgment he probably made; but in view of the one purpose which ruled his life—in view of his fidelity to God, we believe that when on Tuesday evening last his spirit lifted its pinions for a homeward flight, there met him on the golden strand, his Savior glorified, with the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant, thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."



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